

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

CHASTINA B. WALKER HOUSE

(Written Fall, 1990)

I. NAME

Historic: Chastina B. Walker House

Common: None

II. LOCATION

Street Address: 3130 West Wells Street

Tax Key Number: 388-0021-000

Legal Description: ASSESSMENT SUBDIVISION NO. 1 ETC. IN THE NE ¼ SEC 25-7-21, SOUTH 150 FEET OF LOT 22.

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

Robert Fontecchio
1503 North Farwell Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53202

V. YEAR BUILT

1879

Architect: James Douglas

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Walker House is located in what was once a gracious neighborhood of upper class nineteenth century houses. The house is sited at the northeast corner of West Wells and North 32nd Streets. There is a substantial amount of mature landscaping that obscures the house from view in the spring and summer months.

The Walker House is a high style Victorian Gothic residence. It is two stories with an attic and sits on a high foundation of smooth, coursed ashlar limestone. Its asymmetrical composition centers around a square block that is topped with a steeply pitched multi-gabled roof. Projecting from the central block are segmental bays that are topped with steeply pitched gabled roofs with deep reveals and flared eaves.

The Walker House is of frame construction encased with Milwaukee cream brick. Stone is used as trim for the windowsills and wood is used extensively to decorate the gable ends and in the finely detailed front porch. All masonry surfaces below the roofline have been painted. The picturesque character of the house is enhanced by a variety of window types including segmental openings, pointed arched openings, and flat openings with stone lintels that are incised with rondelles and outlined with heavy corbelled hood molds. On the main façade is a two-story segmental bay that is highly decorated with different patterns of brickwork and topped with wrought-iron cresting. The gable ends have elaborate scroll sawn and turned truss work. The front porch is also of note with incised porch posts that support a denticulated cornice and a low rising, truncated hip roof.

Changes to the Walker House have been minimal. The exterior is virtually intact with little or no change to the form, design and details except for the small flat roofed addition at the northwest corner made in 1897.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Chastina B. Walker House is architecturally significant as one of the finest and least altered examples of an upper class Victorian Gothic style house in Milwaukee. It is notable as a rare, well-preserved example of the work of one of the city's important nineteenth century architects, James Douglas.

VIII. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The land upon which 3130 West Wells Street was built was once part of the vast land holdings of the pioneer Dousman family. By the late 1870s, this portion of the Dousman tract had come under the ownership of Sherburn G. Merrill, superintendent of the Milwaukee Road Railroad Company. Merrill lived nearby on a large estate on the south side of West Wisconsin Avenue near North 32nd Street.

Sherburn Merrill's sister, Chastina B. Walker, relocated to Milwaukee from an unknown location around 1874. Recently widowed by the death of her husband, Bradley Walker, Chastina probably moved here to be closer to her son, Harry B. Walker. Records show that Merrill, Chastina and Harry had all been born in New Hampshire. Harry B. Walker had lived in Milwaukee since about 1869 and had worked at various posts for the Milwaukee Road Railroad, probably as a result of his uncle's influence. His jobs included clerk, clerk of the supply office, assistant paymaster, paymaster and assistant treasurer. He also worked briefly for Pierce and Whaling, a firm that sold steel, iron and railway supplies.

Chastina Walker purchased a 150-foot by 60.18-foot lot from her brother, Sherburn, on September 13, 1878. Deeds indicate that the transaction was secured by payment of one dollar. Ten days later on September 24th, The Sentinel announced that Harry B. Walker "is about to build a handsome Gothic villa" on the corner of 32nd and Wells Streets. The house was designed by architect James Douglas and the estimated cost was \$7,000. On September 6, 1879, the Sentinel reported that the house was almost completed and that it had cost around \$5,500. It was probably around this time that Chastina and Harry moved from their North Fifteenth Street dwelling to their new home. The Walker home was one of four residences built in 1879 near the corner of North 32nd and West Wells Streets, although the Walker house is the only one to survive.

The Walkers enlarged their property in 1888 by purchasing from Merrill an additional 60-foot by 119.15-foot parcel directly north of their house. The north 30 feet of this lot were reserved

for use as a private alley that allowed other families on Wells Street to have access to carriage barns behind their dwellings.

It appears that the Walkers left Milwaukee some time around 1892. Harry had moved to the Plankinton Hotel in 1892 and thereafter is not listed in the city directories. Chastina last appears in the directories in 1891. Miss Catherine Bailey, to whom Harry B. Walker had become engaged in 1890, continued to live with her mother through 1893, suggesting that the engagement with Harry Walker had been broken off.

In 1892 Chastina Walker sold 3130 West Wells Street to Mary Alice Johnson for \$16,000. Mary Alice was the wife of Walter S. Johnson, who had pursued a variety of occupations. He was born in 1817 in Vermont and held the superintendencies of three different railroads before switching to a career in hotel management. In 1863 he moved to Milwaukee to serve as proprietor of the Newhall House, then went to St. Paul, Minnesota to run an establishment there before returning to Milwaukee in 1872 to serve as secretary of the Milwaukee Hide and Leather Co. From 1874-1883 he was proprietor of the restaurant at the Union Railroad Depot, after which he operated the Union depot Hotel through 1886. Beginning in 1889 he embarked on a career in lumber sales. Johnson would continue in various lumber enterprises, with various partners through at least 1907. From 1892 until about 1894 the Johnson lived at 3130 West Wells Street.

When Johnson was unable to pay the mortgage on the house, the premises were sold by sheriff's auction on July 6, 1896 to mortgage holder James A. Bryden for \$5,450.50. Walter and Mary Johnson subsequently lived at a number of locations in Milwaukee including the Kirby House Hotel, the Hotel Aberdeen, the Plankinton House, and various private residences. For a while the Johnson's lived in Chicago. Johnson was last listed in the Milwaukee city directory in 1910.

Bryden, who acquired 3130 W. Wells Street at sheriff's auction in 1896 and obtained full title on July 10, 1897, sold the south 150 feet of the property to Clementine E. Rogers for \$11,000 on July 10, 1897. Clementine was the wife of Charles Cassius (Cash) Rogers. The Rogers' had already been living at 3130 W. Wells Street since at least 1895 according to city directories and society Blue Books. They had probably been planning to acquire 3130 West Wells Street for a while since even before the purchase date the Rogers' had taken out a building permit to construct a 12 foot by 16 foot, \$450 rear brick addition to the house. This permit was taken out on June 2, 1897. This addition, together with some 1890s period woodwork and plasterwork on the interior, appear to be the only significant alterations to the house. The Rogers' purchased the north 119.15-foot by 60.18-foot parcel from Bryden on December 19, 1900 for \$4,500 making their total investing in the property \$15,500. This north parcel was later sold to Cassius' brother Fred W. Rogers on May 21, 1908. He in turn sold the parcel to developers O. J. Schenk and J. M. Granger on May 7, 1914. Schenk and Granger erected two houses on this parcel in 1914, addressed today at 822 and 828 North 32nd Street.

The Rogers' lived at 3130 W. Wells Street through about 1919. C. C. Rogers, popularly known as "Cash" due to his middle name, had been born at Cambridge, Maine in 1847. His parents moved to Sheboygan County, Wisconsin in 1856, and, after public school, Cash attended Bisbee's Military College (later known as Eastman College) at Poughkeepsie, New York (1866-1869). He then taught mathematics there. Rogers resigned his college teaching post to go into the real estate business in Chicago. He settled permanently in Milwaukee in 1876. In addition to real estate, Rogers also headed a grain commission business. He was said to have been a member of the Milwaukee, Chicago and Minneapolis exchanges. In 1890 with his brother, Fred W. Rogers, and John S. George, who worked for the North Western

Railroad, Cash Rogers laid out the village of South Milwaukee. Rogers was also active in politics and was a Mason. He was secretary of the Republican State Central committee under Henry C. Paine and was a state senator from Milwaukee from 1902-1906. He served as president of the Advancement Association of Milwaukee from 1890-1893. Rogers also served as a correspondent for the Chicago Times for 10 years.

Rogers' memberships in the Masons included the Kilbourn Lodge No. 3, Calument Chapter No. 73, Ivanhoe Commandery, Wisconsin Consistory, Tripoli Shrine, and Order of the Eastern Star. He served in various positions in the state grand lodge as well as editor of the Masonic Tidings for twelve years. After leaving 3130 W. Wells Street, Rogers and his wife moved to the Cudahy apartments. Rogers died May 11, 1937 at the age of 90, following a fracture of his hip in a fall.

City directories show that Frank Luick seceded the Rogers family at 3130 W. Wells Street from 1920 through 1922. Luick was the secretary of the Sterling Motor Truck Company. The house was subsequently owned and occupied by Frederick C. and Jolina Klug, who turned it into a rooming house. The Klugs built the concrete block garage behind the house in 1925. Anton Vucins and later his wife, Tekla bought the house from the Klugs in the mid-1950s. The Vucins occupied it until the summer of 1990 when Tekla Vucins died. Like the Klugs, the Vucins also lived in the house and rented rooms.

The Architect

James Douglas (July 23, 1823 – August 31, 1894) was born in Wick, Scotland, and as a boy moved with his parents James Alexander and Annabella McKenzie Douglas to Gananoque, Canada. In 1843 Douglas came to Milwaukee to seek his fortune and set himself up in business as a carpenter. He took part in the construction of the first bridge across the Milwaukee River at Wisconsin Avenue and later built a bridge across the river at Kinnickinnic Avenue. As a master builder, he directed work on the old City Hall, the first St. Gall's Church, Holy Trinity Church, St. John's Cathedral, and other early buildings. With his younger brother Alexander, James Douglas established a building company in 1847 and later established the firm of J. & A. Douglas in the late 1850s. The brothers sometimes listed themselves as carpenters, sometimes as builders, and sometimes as architect-buildings. For sixteen years the two brothers had a lucrative business. Douglas then left the trade and between 1863 and 1872 worked for the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company where his expertise in property values enabled the company to place loans and invest in real estate. Douglas' love of architecture led him to return to that profession in 1872, and he continued as an architect until the time of his death.

Specializing in residential design, Douglas was probably the most prolific architect working in Milwaukee's Lower East Side. Part of that neighborhood was said to have been nicknamed "Douglasville" because so many houses were of his design. In 1874 Douglas published two articles, "A Modern Home" and "Modern House" that appeared in The Milwaukee Monthly Magazine. Local historians James Buck and Howard Louis Conard credit Douglas as the founder of a distinct architectural style called "Termes Mordax" or the anthill style, because of his complicated roofs supposedly resembled the cone-shaped colonies of African termites. Douglas' plans were said to be popular throughout the state and from Florida to California, although no out-of-state Douglas commissions have been identified.

In his later years Douglas became increasingly involved in real estate speculation and was known to have had a real flair in timing his purchases and sales. He founded and was treasurer of the Savings and Investment Association, was the first vice-president of the First

Avenue Land Company and the Lincoln Heights Land Company. Douglas owned large land holdings south of Oklahoma Avenue called Douglasdale. He also served as the first president of the Northwest Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

Douglas' architectural practice served as a training ground for a later generation of architects including Alfred C. Clas, who started with the firm in 1880 and who was Douglas' partner in 1885 and 1886, as well as Cornelius Leenhouts, Fred Graf, and Otto C. Uehling. In 1893 illness forced Douglas to take his young son Earl J. into partnership under the name of James Douglas & Co. and another son, R. Bruce, was put in charge of handling the real estate activities of the company. James Douglas died of spinal trouble at the age of 71 on August 31, 1894 at his residence at 1325 North Jackson Street where he had lived since 1867. Earl J. Douglas continued his father's architectural practice through 1900 while R. Bruce Douglas went on to successfully conduct a real estate, mortgage, insurance and appraisal business and built over one hundred homes during his career.

Douglas was a prolific domestic architect and a few examples of his houses from all phases of his career have been identified. His designs in the 1870s were almost exclusively in the Victorian Gothic style, but a very few examples have survived intact. The Walker House is the finest surviving Milwaukee example of his work in the Victorian Gothic style. The Walker House makes an interesting comparison with Douglas' other great Victorian Gothic residence, the recently restored Dr. Fisk Holbrook Day House, 8000 West Milwaukee Avenue in Wauwatosa, built in 1874-75. One of the few other houses known to be by Douglas that has survived intact from this phase of his career is his small double house for Elias Calkins at 1612-14 East Kane Place, built in 1875. It is also Victorian Gothic in style and built of wood.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Chastina B. Walker House, 3130 West Wells Street, be designated as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its fulfillment of criteria e-5 and e-6 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e), of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent

A. Roofs

Retain the original roof shape. Dormers, skylights and solar collector panels may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street. Avoid making changes to the roof shape that would alter the building height, roofline, or pitch. Avoid using new roofing materials that are inappropriate to the style and period of the building. Replace deteriorated roof coverings with new materials that resemble the original roofing in size, shape, color and texture.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles that were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- b. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting brick or stone surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products that could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone.
- c. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material that is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials that are inappropriate or were unavailable when the building was constructed.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of windowpanes or sash.
2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should supplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements such as unpainted aluminum combination storm and screen units. Avoid the filling-in or covering of openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block. Avoid using modern style window units such as horizontal sliding sash in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building or the use of vinyl or metal clad units.

D. Porches, Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design and appearance.

E. Additions

The south, east and west elevations are integral to the structure's architectural significance. Additions are not recommended and require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations.

F. Non-Historic Additions/Non-Historic Structures

Alterations to non-historic buildings shall be made in such a way as to be as sympathetic as possible to the historic building or neighboring buildings. If possible, alterations should seek to lessen the adverse impact of the non-historic building on the historic components of the structure.

G. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the building.

H. Site Features

New plant materials, wooden patio decks, fencing, paving and lighting fixtures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building. Stockade and chain link fencing are generally not appropriate to the character of the building.